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RECENT AMERICAN BIOGRAPHIES AND LETTERS¹

BY WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER

I HAVE heard all my life that the age of letter-writing has passed. We are too busy now, they said, to write letters. The shorthand secretaries, the typewriter, the telephone, made letter-writing unnecessary. There is no more leisure for calm reflection or for well-ordered composition. Can you picture to yourself Horace Walpole talking into a dictagraph? Could Madame de Sévigné, queen of the realm of epistolary correspondence, have allowed herself to be hurried in order to catch the next mail collection?

Happily, however, the predictions of the pessimists have not come true. Just as down to July 1914, good persons gave a dozen unanswerable reasons why there could never be another war, so the arguments against the survival of letter-writing were clear, cogent, unanswerable—and untrue. In both cases only one thing was lacking—the Fact. The argument was perfect, but the Fact did not bear it out.

In looking over a few of the Biographies with letters which have recently appeared, I am impressed by this truth. I doubt whether any other similarly brief period has witnessed the publication of more or better letters. We find no equivalents, perhaps, to Walpole's carefully premeditated sketches of English social life and manners in the eighteenth century, or of Thomas Gray's delicate vignettes of foreign travel, so restrained in their emotion, so perfect in their culture, so high-bred. But though

¹ *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-65*; ed. by Worthington Chauncey Ford. Boston and New York. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Letters to A Niece; by Henry Adams. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Theodore Roosevelt and His Time; by Joseph Bucklin Bishop. N. Y. Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Life of Joseph Hodges Choate; by Edward Sanford Martin. N. Y. Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Letters of Henry James; selected and edited by Percy Lubbock. N. Y. Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Letters of William James; edited by his son Henry James. Boston. The Atlantic Monthly Press.

we lack these we have our compensations. The rôle of the nineteenth century epistolographers begins with Byron, and who has equalled, much less surpassed him in the special range of his art where he excelled?

Letters worth printing and reading may be of several different kinds. They may reveal, for instance, the traits and nature of a rare character. The writer may have been a public personage, so that his letters will have a more or less historical interest. Or in their workmanship, or style they may be so excellent as to live on the strength of that. Most persons write routine or informational letters. Contrasted with these writers are those endowed, if not overweighted, with temperament. You recognize at once the difference between those who describe things seen and things felt. The charm of Lord Byron lies in the spontaneity with which he pours out opinions, passions, emotions, with a vital phrase or an unforgettable epithet. Sir Walter Scott, on the other hand, seems often merely to have sent pages from a descriptive chapter of one of his novels.

The essentials of all letters of whatever class are spontaneity and the personal touch. These two qualities may even suffice to keep letters alive. We reluct, instinctively, against letters which are not spontaneous, letters in which the writer indulges in flowery diction or artificial sentiment. Few modern letters have appealed to more readers than have those of Robert Louis Stevenson; but I cannot rid myself of the impression that they are seldom, if ever, spontaneous. Stevenson was almost obsessed by the desire to be literary. Therefore, if he were sending only a hasty note on a commonplace subject, he would take care to make it literary, premeditated. Very different from Byron who never considered whether the public was looking over his shoulder or not; whereas Stevenson seems always to have had in mind that whatever he wrote would be printed. You must judge such literary letters, therefore, as you would judge imaginary correspondence, like Montesquieu's "*Lettres Persanes*."

Among books which I wish to consider here, I will choose first *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865*, because the Adams family ranks easily first among those who have most enriched American epistolary correspondence. "My grandfather, John Quincy

Adams," I once heard the late Charles F. Adams remark, with a characteristic mock indignation, "had the terrible diary habit." And so true is this that the published diaries and letters of the family extending through four generations, would now easily fill a twenty-foot bookshelf. Before John Quincy Adams came his father and mother John and Abigail, and after him were his son Charles Francis, the great Minister to England, and then his sons, Charles Francis Jr., and Henry.

The men of the newer generations seem to have formed themselves on John Quincy Adams, who learned from eighteenth century models—the men who caught something of Dr. Johnson's magisterial style, but rarely showed traces of his wit. This style became the accepted dialect of State papers and diplomacy. You could be very accurate in it but you could neither be light nor brief. Your sentences required plenty of room to deploy themselves in. J. Q. Adams, from long practice, limbered a little, and the tendency to unstiffen easily traceable in him, becomes marked in his son Charles Francis. The latter, in the *Cycle of Letters* which Mr. Worthington C. Ford has selected, is a fine example of those among his contemporaries who were educated about 1830. He writes from London, where he was American Minister throughout the Civil War, and his letters are addressed to his son Charles F. who was fighting in the Union Army at home. He has that tendency to moralize, that sense of obligation to give didactic advice, which belonged to the solid men of his time. Thus, in replying to a very racy letter, he says: "We were sufficiently edified by your report of the conferences with various parties in authority. I am not much surprised by it. Human patience is not great. . . . It is an excellent thing to cultivate good manners as a habit, for thus comes an artificial rein on the passions that benefits all parties almost equally." (II, 197.) Sometimes, the Minister describes the political situation as he sees it in London, or some of the public men with whom he is thrown. In sum, the Minister's correspondence supplies many interesting and a few important facts about his diplomatic labors during the four years when he held the American Union outpost in Europe. We admire his steady judgment. Even in crises where a rupture seemed imminent and

unavoidable he did not lose his nerve, and his prophecies came true much oftener than did those of the young men who were more easily swayed by the portents of the hour.

His sons' letters may be read in either of two ways: you may read them as you would any narrative, for the incidents and information which they contain; or you may read them for the revelations which they give of their writers. Charles at twenty-six, and Henry at twenty-three, were already potentially the men whom the world has known by their after-careers and by their autobiographies; but Charles at least, leaves a more pleasing impression on one in these pages, which he wrote without any autobiographic intention, than he did in his actual *Autobiography* in which, at eighty, he painted the portrait of himself which he wished men to regard as true. I know of no officer of our Civil War whose correspondence from the field compares with his in entertainment. He describes everything—the humdrum of daily life, the chance happening of the hour, the rumors that flitted through the camp, his opinions on his subordinates and on his superiors, the blunders made and the difficulties ahead. His keen and active mind speculated on the larger aspect of the war and on the practical questions of strategy and logistics. He possessed in full measure the Adams characteristic of speaking out, which has marked the family for a hundred and fifty years. In another person it would have required courage to utter his criticisms but an Adams would have been ashamed of himself if he had dignified by the name of courage what was the obvious thing to say.

The letters between Charles F., Jr., and Henry are filled with strong affection, without which, the brothers could not have continued to assail each other as frankly as they did, and remain friends. Throughout life they not only agreed to disagree in their opinions, but they seemed to delight each in telling the other just what he thought of him for holding that opinion. I doubt whether either would have allowed a third person to criticize his brother so roundly. Already, in 1862, Charles regarded Henry as a poseur, an opinion which he held to the end. But he duly appreciated Henry's keen intellect and enjoyed his wit even when it seemed to him cynical. Listen to this searching analysis

of Henry, which Charles, just approaching Port Royal for active service, sent to him:

You set up for a philosopher. You write letters *a la* Horace Walpole; you talk of loafing round Europe; you pretend to have seen life. Such twaddle makes me feel like a giant Warrington talking to an infant Pendennis. *You* 'tired of this life!' *You* more and more 'callous and indifferent about your own fortunes!' Pray how old are you and what has been your career? You graduate and pass two years in Europe, and witness by good luck a revolution. You come home and fall upon great historic events and have better chances than any young man to witness and become acquainted with them. You go abroad while great questions are agitated in a position to know all about them. Fortune has done nothing but favor you and yet you are 'tired of this life.' You are beaten back everywhere before you are twenty-four, and finally writing philosophical letters you grumble at the strange madness of the times and haven't even faith in God and the spirit of your age. What do you mean by thinking, much less writing such stuff? 'No longer any chance left of settled lives and Christian careers!' Do you suppose the world is coming to an end now? Hadn't you better thank God that your lot is cast in great times? How am I throwing myself away? Isn't a century's work of my ancestors worth a struggle to preserve? Am I likely to do so much that it won't do for me to risk my precious life in this great struggle? Come—no more of this. Don't get into this vein again, or if you do, keep it to yourself. . . . We shall come out all right and if we don't, the world will. Excuse me if I have been rough, but it will do you good. (January 1862. I, 100, 101.)

To follow the frank give and take between the brothers is a point of unfailing interest in this Cycle of Letters.

Henry Adams's *Letters to A Niece* have autobiographic value of two kinds. Some of the letters show him at the top of his style, and they all reveal that side of him which made him dear to children. Persons who have formed their opinion of Henry Adams from his *Education* and nothing else, think of him as a cynic or as a man of Voltairean wit. Few know that he was the peculiar and unique "Uncle Henry" of the children of several families—those of his brothers John and Charles Francis, those of John Hay, and of the Hoopers, who were his wife's nieces. Mrs. Bancel LaFarge, to whom most of the letters in this small collection were written, was one of the children who found the way to "Uncle Henry's" heart, and for whom he was an unfailing source of fun and information. His letters to her from the South Seas are very beautiful, giving not only descriptions of things

seen, but also of the atmosphere of places visited. In the sympathetic introduction prefixed to the volume, Mrs. LaFarge, who is a Roman Catholic, perhaps unintentionally, leaves on the reader the impression that Henry Adams was at heart almost if not wholly a Roman Catholic. Nothing could be further from the truth. As a historian, he understood the place which that religion had occupied in human development, and through his historic imagination he has given in *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* the most exquisite and emotional glorification of the Virgin in English, or perhaps any language; but he was no more a believer in Roman Catholicism than was Voltaire or Leopardi, or any of the other pretended converts. Mrs. LaFarge publishes in this volume Henry Adams's Hymn to the Virgin and to the Dynamo, in which we may suspect he characteristically wished to give an example of the cosmic irony with which life abounds and which he made it his business to describe.

These letters and the poem cannot be overlooked by any one who desires to know all the elements of Henry Adams's genius.

Theodore Roosevelt and His Time, by Joseph Bucklin Bishop, has whatever importance attaches to the fact that it is the "official biography" of a great man. Very often "official" lives are not finally accepted as the true lives, and I cannot believe that this one will be. But as it contains a large number of Roosevelt's letters on the public events with which he was connected, it must always remain the first source or quarry from which readers and later historians will draw.

That this method of arranging a public man's letters is not equivalent to, or can ever take the place of a first-rate biography, Mr. Bishop's work will forever bear witness. If you doubt my statement, compare *Theodore Roosevelt and His Time* with John Morley's *Life of Gladstone*. Morley had an even greater mass of material to sift and put in order; but as he was a born biographer—next to Sir George Trevelyan, the chief British master of the art in our time—he constructed a large, dignified and symmetrical edifice. Mr. Bishop, however, not having either by nature or by training a biographer's endowment, raises no edifice, but leaves his material heaped up in separate blocks awaiting

the coming of a builder. The connecting passages by which he joins one episode to another do not rise in thought or in style above the level of respectable journalism. After all, a journalist who waits until he is over seventy, before he begins to practise biography has a serious handicap.

The first, the essential truth for a biographer to cleave to is that a man's life is continually flowing from birth to death like a river. Unless the biographer gives the impression of motion forward, he falls short very seriously. No mere crowded assembling of a lot of episodes can be a substitute for the fluent narrative. Mr. Bishop does not always choose wisely. Perhaps it was justifiable in order to pique the society curiosity of magazine readers to insert the chapter on "Roosevelt and Royalties" when the material was first printed in a magazine, but most of the contents are trivial, and some of the royal letters would not have been printed if their authors had been plain John Jones and Peter Hogan. I remember that in the middle of the Great War when I happened to be at Sagamore Hill, Roosevelt handed me three autograph letters which he had recently received from three European kings. "Read these," he said to me in substance; "but don't mention them or else the public would accuse me of being cocky at having kings for correspondents." The letters written on delicately tinted paper with conspicuous monograms and slightly perfumed, contained nothing of importance.

The quality which most attracts in Mr. Bishop is the sincerity of his devotion to Roosevelt. Of Roosevelt's letters themselves what shall I say? I do not remember any which leaves any doubt as to its meaning. They show that his mental energy never flagged and that he had the faculty of bringing his whole mind to bear on whatever subject he was dealing with. Inevitably, in order to keep up with the immense correspondence which poured incessantly upon him, he had to resort to dictation, and dictation is the tomb of style. Had he had more time, he would have written more compactly, and by so doing he would in some cases have avoided looseness of tissue. But taking the mass as a whole, it is a worthy expression of its writer, and that is essential in the best letters of any writer who happens to be

also a genius. I need not dilate upon the value, both biographical and historical, which these letters possess.

Mr. Edward Sanford Martin, who has assembled the *Life of Joseph Hodges Choate*, "chiefly from his letters" has been known for a long time to the readers of *Life*, as a clear and pungent writer, a kindly wit, and a man of illuminated common sense. One would have thought of him, therefore, as well qualified to write the biography of Mr. Choate, and his actual performance does not disappoint expectation. Having the definite purpose to allow, so far as the documents permit, Mr. Choate to tell his own story, Mr. Martin keeps himself more in the background, perhaps, than was necessary. It is natural, I suppose, for any one who has lived in the very throb of New York life for forty years, to take it for granted that allusions to persons and places in Gotham would be as readily understood by readers in Walla Walla or in Tombstone, or even in Boston, as by those in the metropolis itself. The absence of sufficient footnotes and of explanations of local events, is the chief point which I should criticize adversely in Mr. Martin's work.

Part of Mr. Martin's first volume is devoted to a reprint of Mr. Choate's Autobiography, which he wrote shortly before he died and covers about the first thirty years of his life—an interesting fragment with recollections of Salem, Massachusetts in the 'thirties and 'forties of the last century, and of Harvard College during the presidency of Jared Sparks, and of the experiences of a young lawyer beginning practice in New York City in the 'fifties. Before Choate's marriage in 1861 Mr. Martin draws chiefly on his letters to his Mother. After that event, his source is the letters to Mrs. Choate, uninterrupted for more than fifty years, and supplemented later by letters to his children. The result is, a complete revelation of Mr. Choate by himself, and seldom, so far as I recall, has so intimate a family portrait of a prominent man been compiled. We see Choate as he saw himself and as he revealed himself to his dearest intimates.

Some readers may complain that we should like to know not only how his wife and mother and children knew him but how also outsiders or closest friends saw him. But although Choate

had many friends in many cities, he does not seem to have kept up a regular correspondence with any of them. Such a correspondence as gives not only items of news and external happenings, but records convictions and opinions from the deeps of a man's life. Nevertheless, Mr. Martin somewhat fills this gap by quoting remarks on Choate from his associates at the Bar, and his fellow workers in other interests. We see unmistakably, therefore, what a dominant citizen Choate was from before his thirtieth year until his death. As a lawyer, a member of the great firm of which William M. Evarts was the head, he had charge of several of the most famous cases of his time. He served on innumerable committees, civic, charitable, political and artistic, and he helped to revise the Constitution of New York State. Among his triumphs was his prosecution of Tammany and the Tweed Ring in 1871.

Almost half of the second volume is taken up with Choate's life in London as American Ambassador, from 1899 to 1905. You will find few revelations of historical importance, but instead a running commentary by a brilliant observer of diplomatic affairs and especially of English high life. Interspersed among this material, also, are citations from some of Mr. Choate's addresses delivered in England.

He came home to enjoy more than ten years of a happy old age, and when the Great War broke out in 1914, he lifted his voice against the atrocities of the Germans and the supineness of the American Government under President Wilson. It seems a singularly appropriate ending to his long career that he lived to welcome Mr. Balfour, head of the British Mission to the United States, when he came to New York City in May 1917. Mr. Choate went through every detail of his programme with spirit and with every satisfaction. "Remember," he said to Mr. Balfour, as they parted after the service in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, "we shall meet again to celebrate the victory." Three days later, he died.

Fifty years ago, when Americans spoke the name of Choate, they referred to Rufus Choate. To most of us now the name means Joseph Hodges Choate, Fortune's darling if ever there was one.

The *Letters of Henry James* have had the good fortune to fall into the hands of an editor both sympathetic and competent, Mr. Percy Lubbock. Mr. Lubbock furnishes all the information necessary and he has certainly chosen the letters that best illustrate Mr. James's development in literary style and in character. Perhaps he has not drawn sufficiently from the letters which illustrate certain important sides of James's nature and of his varying attitude towards England.

Among American writers, Henry James is the only one who seemed to make a parade of obscurity. These letters confirm, what was long ago discernible in his books, that his attempts to be involved and strange are deliberate; but you must do him the justice to believe that he adopted his method, not to excite a vulgar sensation, but because he thought that by it he could best express himself. If you read Henry James when he was young—when he contributed sketches and essays and reviews to the *New York Nation*, or wrote his first stories—you find nothing unusual in his manner. He was more than fifty years old before he had succeeded with infinite pains, in bringing the style which was peculiarly his own, to perfection. Perhaps it is not fair to imply that he deliberately chose to write obscurely, in order to arouse vulgar astonishment; for he had, as these letters show, an almost pathological desire to record the most minute or finical or casual impressions. He was the Master of *nuance* in our time. Flaubert used to be acclaimed by the preachers of “Art for Art’s sake” because he rolled upon the floor, and groaned, and wept when he could not think of just the fitting adjective to serve his purpose. It is not reported that Henry James went through similarly absurd antics in his search for a desired *nuance*. But sometimes in reading him we feel that he was too preoccupied with these matters. Instead of rolling on the floor and groaning and tearing his hair, however, he avoided his difficulty by a plain dodge—he strung six or eight adjectives in a row and left the reader to choose. He even followed one string by another string of adjectives of opposite meaning, or color. The Letters prove that all was carefully premeditated.

To be frank, I am not qualified to criticize James's later novels, for I never got beyond *The Golden Bowl*, and I gave that

up early in the first volume. But his style encumbered not his fiction alone, but all his work. Nearly twenty years ago, in reviewing his *Life of William Wetmore Story*, one of the most disloyal biographies I ever read, because the biographer devotes the larger part of his text to himself, and the smaller to his subject, I wrote:

Such writing approaches painfully near to intellectual locomotor ataxia—first a shuffle forward by the space of two or three words, then a comma for pause, then the shuffle forward and another comma, and at the end of the toilsome trip one wonders what it was all about. If this were an unavoidable disease by which Mr. James has been attacked, we should pity him, and say nothing; but it is, as any one who has followed his degeneration can verify, the result of a deliberate attempt to have ‘style.’ It is artificiality, prepense, literary foppery,—grimaces, gestures, powdering, and rouging done before a mirror. Like all affectation it is suicidal.

Readers who wish to verify for themselves the transformation in Henry James’s style, will find ample means to do so. About 1890, being chagrined by the almost widespread lack of recognition which his novels had received from the public, he determined, after issuing *The Tragic Muse*, to abandon fiction and to devote himself to play-writing. He planned to make the experiment thorough and scientific, and, indeed, he wrote five or six plays during the following five years. He told his brother William, enthusiastically, that he had found his proper form of expression. But, at the final account, only two of his plays had been put on the stage and these had enjoyed no real public triumph. With reluctance, and greatly depressed he brought himself to acknowledge that he had mistaken his vocation. The stuff that drama is made of is passion, and this must be expressed passionately. The search for adjectives, the straining after *nuances* cannot simulate passion. In the James novels, persons required to be dressed in certain garments, or the episodes to be staged very carefully, but as the passion of Othello concerns the soul, the color of his turban does not matter. Henry James had so long pursued externals, that he had lost contact with the deep realities which are internal. William warned him in the early days against the flimsiness of the substance of his stories, and he admitted it, but said that he did not wish to use up the great

subjects before he had perfected his style. But when he supposed that he had reached this point, he was not equal to tackling the great subjects.

After the failure of his plays he returned to writing novels. But instead of accepting the verdict of the public that his earlier works and his plays were too entangled to be popular, he now, and to the end of his life, elaborated his style which became still more involved and impossible. By what paradox was it that Henry James, who knew modern French literature more intimately than did any other novelist writing in English, missed the chief glory of the French language, which is clarity, and ended in the clumsy obscurity, which is German?

The second volume of the *Letters* embodies his later style—that “third manner” which his brother William has criticized once for all. The last ten years are sad years. Persons who thought of Henry James as one of the chief literary figures of our time, will be surprised to learn that he was much more talked about than read. That while he had staunch and even fanatical admirers they were few in number, and that he felt keenly his failure to capture popularity. Much illness and the loss of several intimate friends—including his two brothers, William and Robertson—added to the depression of this period. At times he became so self-centred that we weary of reading him. But he had a large and genuine source of affection, and evidently those who were near him were under the spell of his charm. He was most generous in recognizing the young authors and he praised extravagantly, as it seems to me, some of those whose works delighted him. Kipling alone, among the new men, he disparaged or ignored, but Kipling was the one among them all who had what James lacked, passion and the power of direct simple speech. What a difference it might have made in Henry James’s productions after 1890, if a few drops of Kipling’s blood could have been transfused into him!

The last letters, covering the first two years of the Great War, are a most distressing threnody. Henry James felt the tragedy in which Good and Evil were in a death grapple. He felt the shame of the American Administration which kept America, the God-ordained champion of Democracy, from going to the aid of

European Democracies. Shortly before his death he renounced his American allegiance, and became a British subject, thereby bravely bearing witness to his sense of justice and morality.

Interesting and even important as the works which I have glanced at undoubtedly are, the *Letters of William James* are the one real addition to American literature. First, they prove William James to be the best of American letter-writers, and next, they add to our gallery of American celebrities an amazingly lifelike portrait of a great man. In what other collection of Letters shall we find a writer so swift, so vivid, so varied and so spontaneous? James reveals to us all his moods, his likes and dislikes, his communing with the universe, his fun. Unintentionally, he writes his autobiography, in which we trace his intellectual development; not, of course, in a logical step-by-step narrative, but in rapid and vigorous confessions from period to period.

From the first he exhibited an insatiate curiosity. He had an intuitive conviction that he must never be satisfied until he found the occupation for which his talents fitted him, and in which he could expand to the full capacity of his powers. So he watched his growth to see whether he was getting and doing as much spiritually and intellectually as he believed he ought. At twenty-three he went on the expedition to the Amazon with Louis Agassiz—a marvelous opportunity for a young naturalist: but when he found that the work which came to him was not sufficiently connected with what he regarded as his special field, he was for leaving Agassiz's party and returning to Cambridge.

But even when prevented from devoting himself to his first choice, he discovered, as most young men do who are destined to go far in life, how to make the most of the second best. Young genius thrives better on half a loaf of bread than on cake. For several years he had also the stern discipline of ill health which was so persistent that he almost despaired of looking forward to a life of work and usefulness. Nevertheless, he did improve, he was able to attend the Harvard Medical School, and he pursued his studies in zoölogy. This led, by perfectly natural stages, to investigations of the relations between the physiological and

the psychological worlds. It would not be correct to say that the subject of psychology was like the Sleeping Beauty, and that William James was the Prince who came and awakened her; for he was not, of course, the pioneer. But through his criticism of what other psychologists were unfolding, and through his own investigations, he notably extended the limits of the science, and, when he was little more than forty years old, he was regarded as one of its chief living masters.

His attitude towards metaphysics was particularly characteristic and modern. He found that the discussions of metaphysicians and philosophers circled round assumptions which had been so often repeated that they were taken for granted. Men talked gravely and even reverently of the "Absolute," as if it rested on evidence as undoubted and as demonstrable as does that of the Multiplication Table. His own habit of accepting nothing but of testing everything, led him naturally to the doctrine of Pragmatism which he preached in his later years. Through his letters you see how he passed from stage to stage until he reached his final goal. A few of the letters may seem hard to readers unaccustomed to the *patois* of psychology, but they are in reality remarkably untechnical and unpedantic, and written in James's fresh, clear diction. In one of his essays he spoke of a young woman who was described as "bottled lightning"; that description would apply to his correspondence which simply embodies himself.

I must not pass over one very important trait which shines through these letters and was the Morning Star of William James's life—family affection. There is nothing more beautiful, so far as I know, among the letters of great men, than the last letter which William in London wrote to his father, dying in Cambridge. It ends: "Good night, my sacred old Father. If I don't see you again—Farewell! A blessed Farewell!" (Dec. 14, 1882. I, 220.) For a specimen of a very different kind, displaying James in a whimsical mood, read an inimitable letter to Mrs. Henry Whitman (June 16, 1895, II, pp. 20–22).

His affection for his brother Henry never slackened, in spite of Henry's long exile in England, his utterly different view of life, his alienation from America and from the ideals which the

brothers had grown up in together. William, the elder, and the real genius, stood in admiration and awe of Henry, the younger brother, the pet of a small but influential literary clique. No better criticism of Henry James's affected style has ever been made than appears in the following passage in a letter of May 4, 1907 from William to Henry:

. . . I've been so overwhelmed with work, and the mountain of the *Unread* has piled up so, that only in these days have I really been able to settle down to your 'American Scene,' which in its peculiar way seems to me *supremely great*. You know how opposed your whole 'third manner' of execution is to the literary ideals which animate my crude and Orson-like breast, mine being to say a thing in one sentence as straight and explicit as it can be made, and then to drop it forever; yours being to avoid making it straight, but by dint of breathing and sighing all round and round it, to arouse in the reader who may have had a similar perception already (Heaven help him if he hasn't!) the illusion of a solid object, made (like the 'ghost' at the Polytechnic) wholly out of impalpable materials, air and the prismatic interferences of light, ingeniously focussed by mirrors upon empty space. But you *do* it, that's the queerness! And the complication of innuendo and associative reference on the enormous scale to which you give way to it does so *build out* the matter for the reader that the result is to solidify, by the mere bulk of the process, the like perception from which *he* has to start. As air, by dint of its volume, will weigh like a corporeal body; so his own poor little initial perception, swathed in this gigantic envelopment of suggestive atmosphere, grows like a germ into something vastly bigger and more substantial. But it's the rummest method for one to employ systematically as you do nowadays; and you employ it at your peril. In this crowded and hurried reading age, pages that require such close attention remain unread and neglected. You can't skip a word if you are to get the effect, and 19 out of 20 worthy readers grow intolerant. The method seems perverse: 'Say it *out*, for God's sake,' they cry, 'and have done with it.' And so I say now, give us *one* thing in your older directer manner, just to show that, in spite of your paradoxical success in this unheard of method, you *can* still write according to accepted canons. Give us that interlude; and then continue like the 'curiosity of literature' which you have become. For gleams and innuendoes and felicitous verbal insinuations you are unapproachable, but the *core* of literature is solid. Give it to us *once* again! The bare perfume of things will not support existence, and the effect of solidity you reach is but perfume and simulacrum. (II, 277, 278.)

That is the way the James brothers—like the Adams brothers—spoke out to each other. Yet in spite of it, so far as appears, their affection suffered no change. Henry had probably long before this discounted William's critical opinion of his style,—

see his letter of November 23, 1905 (II, 43)—and he made no effort to express himself lucidly. Why should he? His admirers continued to dote upon him just as gourmets cling to their favorite cheese, which repels persons of a natural healthy appetite.

I cannot overpraise the manner in which William's son, Henry, has edited these letters. He had wonderful material to dispose of, as any one can see who reads these volumes. But the material alone was not enough. A block of marble becomes through the skill of an artist a beautiful statue; in the hands of a tombstone cutter it remains a mere stone. Mr. Henry James possesses in high degree those two essentials of every artist—selection and taste. From what must be a large mass of his father's correspondence, he has chosen those letters and parts of letters which, when carefully joined in the mosaic of this work, result virtually in an autobiography. No episode, no trait, is unduly emphasized; each part helps towards the unity of the whole. Mr. Henry James himself is a remarkable writer, so unobtrusive that the reader is scarcely aware of the self repression required to furnish the passages which give the connecting links of biography. The notes are few and brief, but sufficient to supply the information needed in regard to persons, places or allusions. Mr. James carries into the third generation the literary distinction which he has inherited from his father and from his grandfather. He has introduced to the world a perpetually interesting, perpetually human American of genius.

WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER.